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## Defense Aide Says Philippine Insurgency Steadily Gains Strength

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A senior Pentagon official, warning against U.S. complacency about the military situation in the Philippines, yesterday released new intelligence figures showing steady growth in the strength of the Communist Party's New People's Army (NPA), despite the personal popularity of President Corazon Aquino.

Taking issue with the optimistic assessment offered by a senior State Department witness, Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard L. Armitage told the House Foreign Affairs Asia subcommittee that the Aquino government has "regrettably failed" to develop a comprehensive counterinsurgency plan. The NPA has increased in size and expanded the scope of its influence in the countryside, Armitage added.

Meanwhile, an administration source confirmed the general thrust of a report in Newsweek magazine this week that said President Reagan has issued a secret intelligence "finding" authorizing the Central Intelligence Agency to step up its assistance to the Philippine Army. The report said the CIA would expand its intelligence gathering on insurgency activities, including possible overflights of rebel-held areas, and assign about a dozen more agents to its Manila station.

In his testimony, Armitage estimated that the number of regular NPA soldiers grew last year by 9 percent, reaching a total of 24,430. He also said the insurgency has expanded its "presence" and "influence" to about 20 percent of the rural areas, about a fifth more than the previous year.

In an early February interview with The Washington Post, Armitage estimated NPA strength at 23,000 to 23,500 armed men. He said his latest estimate was based on "brand new figures" the Penta-

gon had just received. A little more than a year ago, the Defense Department estimate of NPA soldiers was only 16,500.

Armitage also cited for the first time reports, which he described as unconfirmed, that the NPA is receiving arms from North Korea or Vietnam. Armitage previously has discounted similar reports and said there was no evidence the insurgency was being supported from the outside.

"I would say that the most serious problem confronting both ourselves and the Philippines is complacency," the Pentagon official told the subcommittee. "This is a subtle threat that tempts us to underestimate the dangers that confront Philippine democracy."

"Certainly the story of Cory Aquino and democracy in the Philippines should have a happy ending. But regrettably," he continued, "I must say that such an outcome is by no means assured."

Earlier, Assistant Secretary of State Gaston J. Sigur Jr., who visited the Philippines last week, told the same subcommittee that his overall assessment of the situation there is "very positive," with the Aquino government addressing the communist insurgency "realistically and effectively."

Armitage presented a radically different assessment. He said the Aquino government had "developed and then discarded" one counterinsurgency strategy after another and often ignored the advice of the military.

"Distrust and apathy pervade civil-military relations. Poor communication and coordination are common between civilian and military counterparts at all levels of government," he said.

"The Aquino government has also regrettably failed to develop a comprehensive counterinsurgency plan that integrates military, political, economic and social programs,"

he continued. Deposed President Ferdinand Marcos "erroneously relied, exclusively on military action. Some members of the Aquino administration believe they can rely almost exclusively on symbolic political acts to cure the insurgency," he said.

The Communist Party of the Philippines, along with the NPA, he said, remains committed to overthrowing the Aquino government and establishing a communist state.

The United States has delivered \$64 million in military aid, mostly trucks, uniforms, spare parts and radios, over the last year, increasing significantly the operational capability of helicopters, trucks and communications equipment for the Philippine Army, Armitage said.

But the Army still faces "massive" deficiencies, with a backlog in spare parts and supplies worth as much as \$1 billion, Armitage said.